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ABSTRACT

A classroom-oriented therapeutic program was devised for four pragmatically impaired preschoolers who showed little spontaneous language use within the classroom. Intervention strategies focused on facilitating interactions during free play and were based on four principles for practitioners: be child-oriented; engineer the environment; use low-pressure elicitation; and utilize the classroom staff and environment. In addition, the educational curriculum was changed to reflect a comprehensive view of communication and pragmatics, resulting in individualized education program goals which incorporated a variety of contexts. Six months following the intervention, a pragmatic analysis performed during classroom free play showed that (1) each child communicated more frequently with a broader range of speech acts, and (2) topics were initiated and extended. (JDD)

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Intervention Strategies for Pragmatically Impaired Preschoolers: The Classroom Context

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Within recent years, the validity of working with language impaired children within a natural, conversational and socially interactive context has become apparent. The view from the clinical trenches, however, suggests that practicing clinicians are struggling with the issues of when to leave the therapy room and how best to assume the role of facilitator. This poster session describes procedures which have been successfully utilized for promoting language use within a preschool classroom for handicapped children. Intervention strategies reflect findings from studies of parent-child interaction and current sociolinguistic theory.

Four pragmatically impaired children were chosen to document the effectiveness of these intervention strategies. Out of eight preschoolers enrolled in speech-language therapy, these four children continued to show little spontaneous language use within the classroom despite a minimum of two months of classroom programming and therapy. While more competent communication was evidenced during individual therapy, a pragmatic analysis conducted during classroom free play revealed a preference for nonverbal means of communication, verbal exchanges which were mediated by and directed toward adults and topics which were initiated but not extended. Three out of four children were observers of other children. They exhibited parallel play but rarely initiated interactions or spontaneously engaged in cooperative activities. There appeared to be a lack of the means for initiating either nonverbal or verbal exchanges with peers. The fourth child did not recognize peers or most adults as potential partners in play or communication.

A classroom oriented therapeutic program was devised and implemented jointly by the Speech-Language Pathologist and classroom teachers, with emphasis placed on facilitating interactions during free play. Intervention strategies can be described under four basic principles: Be Child Oriented, Engineer the Environment, Use Low Pressure Elicitation, and Utilize the Classroom Staff and Environment. The significance of these procedures lies in their ease of implementation yet ability to produce marked results with children inhibited by the classroom context. In addition, the educational curriculum changed to reflect a comprehensive view of communication and pragmatics, and resulted in IEP goals which incorporated a variety of contexts.

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Six months after the implementation of these intervention strategies, a pragmatic analysis was again performed during free play within the classroom. The following changes in communicative competence were apparent: each child communicated more frequently and with a broader range of speech acts. Topics were initiated and extended. An overall increase in peer interaction was evidenced, coinciding with a greater percentage of verbalizations directed toward other children. In reality, the classroom was a more dynamic and exciting environment for all participants.

CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION PROFILE

Language Use During Free Play

Length of Observation _____ Date _____
Categorize each utterance, noting A if directed toward adult, P if directed toward peer (adapted from Majlinger et al., 1981).

	CONVERSATIONAL ACTS			
SPEECH ACTS	INITIATE		EXTEND	
	Non Ling.	Ling.	Non Ling.	Ling.
1. Greeting				
2. Call/Direct Attn.				
3. Request Obj/Act				
4. Request Answer				
5. Label/Comment				
6. Protest				
7. Answering				

SUMMARY

Does the child express a range of speech acts (SA's)?
Does the child use a variety of forms to express SA's
Does the child initiate conversations?
Does the child extend conversations?

Additional Behaviors During Free Play

Number of times child spontaneously joins peers _____
Proximity
  to adults
  to peers
Eye contact
Turn Taking
  nonverbally during play
  during conversation
Level of Play (i.e., parallel, co-operative)
Degree of representational play and role playing evidenced
Degree of adult mediation required to structure play and communication

Additional Contexts

Analyze accuracy of response to questions during a group language activity
Grab Bag - assess topic initiation, questioning, relevance when given hidden objects, revealed one at a time

INTERVENTION

PRAGMATIC TARGETS OF CURRICULUM OR IEPs

Nonverbal Interactive Behaviors
- Agent - of action and object
- Eye Contact
- Giving, Showing, Pointing
- Turn Taking during play and joint activity routines

Speech Act Production
- Range of Speech Acts
- Variety of forms to express each communicative intent
- Use in varied contexts

Conversational Skills
- Topic Initiation
- Topic Extension
- Response to questions
- Relevance
- Event recall and prediction

SAMPLE IEP GOALS

-- will establish eye contact with an adult while requesting an object or action, 50% of the time during lunch.

During a quiet, social activity with an adult (i.e., drawing stories, block play), -- will engage in non-verbal turn taking for a minimum of three turns per participant, for 5/10 activities.

Over a two day period during free play, -- will use 10 different phrases to peers, and 20 different phrases to adults for requesting actions, objects and answers.

For 3 out of 5 conversations with a teacher or his mother, -- will exhibit appropriate
- a. topic initiation
- b. extension of topic for four conversational turns

PRINCIPLE ONE: BE CHILD ORIENTED

Strategies

Use SOUL - Silence, Observation, Understanding and Listening to assess the child's interests, activity level, and emotional state before entering play
Play at the child's cognitive and social level
Follow the child's lead in play and language - let the child choose the stimulus
Get down on the child's level (physically)
Mirror emotions
Imitate the child's nonverbal actions
Be animated and interested - treat ordinary or mundane events as exciting, fun and worthy of communication
Interact with the expectation of a response

PRINCIPLE TWO: USE LOW PRESSURE ELICITATION

Strategies

Give the child/children freedom to initiate and terminate the interchange
Use proven facilitation techniques
- communicatively useful language
- imitation
- semantic contingency
- negotiation of meaning

Control the complexity of the linguistic stimuli
Utilize visual, auditory, tactile and kinesthetic cues to enhance linguistic information
Use questions with discretion, to create a shared context
Be outrageous, make mistakes or use verbal absurdities on occasion
Appreciate and integrate humor
Wait for a response

PRINCIPLE THREE: ENGINEER THE ENVIRONMENT

Strategies

Use novel, high interest and motivating materials to facilitate directing attention, requesting (i.e., wrapped boxes, voice activated toys, grab bags, robots)
Set up problems/restrictions to promote commenting, protesting, requesting (i.e., broken toys, materials with batteries missing, tightly closed containers)
Use materials which encourage peer interaction and turn taking (such as large boxes where one rides, one pushes; dress-up clothes; blocks)

Utilize peers
- as verbal models
- as the"object" of language
- to initiate interactions
- to divide materials

Set up activities which promote representational play and role playing (household corner, community helper props, etc.)

Control materials which require extensive physical manipulation and thus may inhibit language (extremely important for physically handicapped or neurologically impaired children)

Organize materials so that children do not have to work at non-linguistic behavior

PRINCIPLE FOUR: UTILIZE THE CLASSROOM STAFF AND ENVIRONMENT

Strategies

Spend 25-33% of allocated therapy time within the classroom

Plan classroom therapy to harmonize with daily/monthly themes and activities

Utilize dyads and small groups within the classroom

Supplement individual therapy with a minimum of one large-group language activity per week to demonstrate techniques

Make sure all team members understand the rationale for intervention strategies and are effective with their use

R E S U L T S

Speech Act Production: Initial and Retest Data for 15 min. classroom free play.

	Child A		Child B		Child C		Child D	
Speech Acts	9/86	3/87	9/86	3/87	9/86	3/87	9/86	3/87
Greet	-	1	1	1	-	1	-	-
Call/Direct Attention	3	4	2	3	-	3	-	1
Request Object Action	2	5	-	4	-	7	-	5
Request Answer	2	7	2	2	-	-	-	3
Label/Comment	2	12	3	8	-	6	-	8
Protest	-	2	-	1	1	2	-	1
Answer	1	1	-	1	-	2	-	4
Repeat	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Utterances	12	32	8	20	1	21	0	22
Range of Speech Acts	6	7	4	7	1	6	0	6
% of Utterances Directed to Peers	17	60	40	70	0	38	0	0
Frequency Child Spontaneously Joins Peers	1	5	0	4	0	6	0	2

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